

FIXED PIN ARRAY IDENTIFICATION APPARATUS AND METHOD

Related Cases

The present invention is related to concurrently filed and co-pending US Patent Application Serial Numbers ----- (Attorney Docket D/A1689); ----- (Attorney Docket D/A1689Q1); ----- (Attorney Docket D/A1689Q2); and ----- (Attorney Docket D/A1689Q3), each of the above being incorporated herein by reference.

Field of the Invention

This invention is related in general to keying devices and other apparatus which can identify an end-user when properly fitted thereon and, more particularly, to those apparatus attached having an array of pins attached to a base component and requiring the physical attachment onto said array of pins one or more shaped keyed objects such that each object allows the physical passage of pins to pass therethrough.

Background of the Invention

It is often required in the security field to secure doors and other equipment from access or usage by unauthorized persons. Typically, a magnetic card is swiped through a reader mechanism in order to identify the user requesting access or usage. Often, these magnetic cards are subject to being inadvertently erased by coming in close proximity with or otherwise physically touching a magnetic field or source thereby disabling the card from proper usage. Keys can also be utilized to permit access through certain doors but keys can be bent or broken thereby rendering them useless as well.

In addition, it is often necessary to physically attach one or more secondary devices to a primary device as accessory apparatus prior to the

primary device's initialization and subsequent proper operation. In most instances, a machine is delivered to the end-user or customer with some assembly being required to be performed by the customer. It often is not possible for the devices' manufacturer's technical representatives to be present to monitor and otherwise ensure that secondary device attachment and installation to the primary device has been performed properly in advance of the machine's operation. Incorrect assembly can cause damage to the machine and/or cause injury to the customer. In addition, the primary device may configure itself differently depending on which accessory or secondary devices have been attached thereto. In the instance wherein the primary device is a copier machine, one particular or alternate configuration may be required of the primary device if there are more than one input paper trays attached thereto or multiple output trays attached thereto. As such, the primary device may need a user-friendly and quick method of determining which accessory devices have been attached.

What is needed in the arts is an identification apparatus which cannot be easily erased or broken and which, when placed onto a pin array of a primary device enables the primary device to identify the user requesting access or to identify which accessory devices have been connected or otherwise attached thereto.

Summary of the Invention

What is disclosed herein is an identification apparatus comprising an array of conductive pins fixed onto a base component placed onto a primary device and in communication therewith. A set of shaped identifiers having a plurality of holes through which respective pins on the array of fixed pins pass. Each identifier being uniquely configured with at least one distinct location containing a conductive sleeve fitted therein which allows the passage therethrough of that particular pin for further use by subsequently placed identifiers. Each pin is in individual communication with the primary device such that the primary device can thereafter identify the placed identifiers so as to subsequently perform

certain functions or other desired operations based on the type, configuration, and/or number of identifiers placed thereon.

More specifically, what is disclosed is a base component comprising an array of pins with each pin fixed to a base component. A keyed center post also fixed to the base component is utilized thereon to ensure proper orientation and placement of the identifiers onto the pin array. Individual identifiers are preferably made of a non-conductive material are also disclosed wherein each identifier comprises an array of holes each in alignment with a pin in the pin array of the base component. A keyed center hole in each identifier having a conductive sleeve is provided through which the keyed center post passes. Each identifier is specifically and uniquely configured with at least one conductive sleeve placed in a predetermined hole or pattern of holes such that no two sleeves on separate identifiers contact the same pin when fitted onto the pin array. Wiring associated with each identifier electrically connects each conductive sleeve with the sleeve positioned around the identifier's keyed center hole. A closed circuit is enabled between the primary device up through wiring leading to each individual pin, through each pin/sleeve contact, through the wiring associated with that identifier and over to the center alignment post/sleeve contact, down through the center pin itself and back.

In order to determine which identifiers have been placed onto the pin array, the individual pins in the fixed pin array are polled and a detection process determines which pins have closed circuit configurations, as discussed above. The detection process preferably returns a set of pin/sleeve locations in [row, column] format which defines the locations of the individual pins on the pin array. A first location is then extracted from the returned set of detected locations. Known identifiers and their defined set of pin/sleeve locations stored in a database of known identifiers are selected which have a location matching the first extracted detected location's [row, column] values. Identifiers which have one location matching the extracted detected location are then retrieved from the database of known identifiers as candidates requiring further analysis. For each of the determined identifiers retrieved from the database of stored identifiers and

their respective pin/sleeve [row, column] locations, a process would then step through the stored locations for each of the retrieved identifiers and, through a comparison technique, determine which specific identifier has all of its stored locations in common with locations in the set of detected locations. Since, in this embodiment, no two identifiers, when pressed onto the pin array, are allowed to utilize the same pin/sleeve location, the full set of locations for one of the retrieved stored identifiers will be a subset of the set of detected locations. If one location from the set of stored locations for any of the retrieved identifiers does not match any of the locations from the set of detected locations, then that identifier is thrown out or otherwise considered not to be a match and is therefore not one of the identifiers which has been fitted onto the pin array. When it is determined by comparison that each location contained in the entire set of a retrieved identifier's locations have a match in the set of detected locations, then that identifier is acknowledged and those matching locations in the set of detected locations are then flagged as having been accounted for or are alternatively removed from the set of detected locations. The set of detected locations would now contain remaining detected locations for other identifiers to be matched with. The process repeats itself by then extracting another location from the set of detected locations. Identifiers in the database of stored identifiers are retrieved which have one location matching the extracted location. For each location in the set of each of the retrieved identifiers, a comparison is made to again determine which retrieved identifier's set of stored locations is considered a subset of the set of remaining or non-flagged detected locations. Identifiers are thrown out which do not have a complete match and a single identifier is identified which has all of its stored locations matching locations within the set of detected locations. This identifier is then otherwise acknowledged. Those matching locations within the set of detected locations corresponding to the recently acknowledged identifier are then flagged as having been accounted for or are alternatively removed from the set. The process again repeats itself until the set of detected locations is empty, i.e., all detected locations have been accounted for and all the identifiers have been acknowledged. In the instance

wherein no match can be found in the database of stored identifiers and their respective pin/sleeve locations for one or more detected locations in the set of detected locations, an alarm condition can be set or a predefined set of processes and/or procedures can alternatively be initiated to indicate a fault condition.

Advantages of the present invention, as described herein, may be realized and otherwise obtained by means particularly pointed out and distinctly claimed in the appended claims, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings and detailed specification.

Description of the Drawings

The preferred embodiments and other aspects of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the invention when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings which are provided for the purpose of describing embodiments of the invention and not for limiting same, in which:

Figure 1 shows a subsection of a primary device 1 upon which a base component 6 comprising a keyed center alignment post 12 and an array of fixed pins 16 and which illustrates the method of attaching shaped identifiers shown collectively at 10 and individually at 10A, 10B, and 10C onto the pin array of the base component;

Figure 2 is a top view of a pentagonal shaped identifier 10A of Fig. 1 illustrating a slot for the passage of the keyed center alignment post and a certain configuration of indicated holes fitted with sleeves therein wherein said configuration is distinct from the configuration of the identifiers of Figs 3 and 4;

Figure 3 is a top view of the triangular shaped identifier 10B of Fig. 1 illustrating a slot for the passage of the keyed center alignment post and having a configuration of indicated holes fitted with sleeves therein wherein said configuration is distinct from the configuration of the identifiers of Figs 2 and 4;

Figure 4 is a top view of the rectangular shaped identifier 10C of Fig. 1 illustrating a slot for the passage of the keyed center alignment post and having a

configuration of indicated holes fitted with sleeves therein wherein said configuration is distinct from the configuration of the identifiers of Figs 2 and 3;

Figure 5 is a top view of the base component 16 of Fig. 1 whereupon identifiers 10A, 10B, and 10C have been placed while indicating the location and direction of the cross-sectional view shown in Fig. 6;

Figure 6 illustrates the cross-sectional view of Fig. 5 in order to show that, preferably, height 'h' of the base component's pin array is sufficient to hold the individual identifiers 10A, 10B, and 10C, fitted thereon shown alternatively with varying degrees of thickness and to show communication means, collectively at 22; and

Figure 7 is a top view of the base component 16 of Fig. 1 whereon a row and column have been labeled and numbered such that a matrix of the locations of sleeved holes on the pentagonal shaped identifier 10A of Fig. 2 can be obtained.

Detailed Description of the Invention

What is disclosed herein is an identification apparatus comprising an array of conductive pins fixed onto a base component placed onto a primary device and in communication therewith. A set of shaped identifiers having a plurality of holes through which respective pins on the array of fixed pins pass. Each identifier being uniquely configured with at least one distinct location containing a conductive sleeve fitted therein which allows the passage therethrough of that particular pin for further use by subsequently placed identifiers. Each pin is in individual communication with the primary device such that the primary device can thereafter identify the placed identifiers so as to subsequently perform certain functions or other desired operations based on the type, configuration, and/or number of identifiers placed thereon.

Attention is directed to Fig. 1 which shows a subsection of a primary device 1 upon which a base component 6 comprising a keyed center alignment post 12 and an array of fixed pins 16 and which illustrates the method of attaching shaped identifiers collectively at 10 and individually as 10A, 10B, and

10C onto the pin array of the base component. Primary device 1 can be any device with multiple secondary devices attached each of which serve an intended purpose or which are required for the proper configuration and subsequent operation of the primary device. This would be in the instance wherein the primary device is, for example, a copier machine which arrives at the customer's business or office separated from one or more secondary devices each requiring physical attachment to or configuration with the primary device prior to the primary device's startup and proper operation. One such secondary device, for example, could be a paper tray while another secondary device, for example, would be a paper input device, and a third secondary device could perhaps be a specific type of output tray. Each secondary device would arrive with its own identifier, in Fig. 1 shown as in pentagonal, triangular, and rectangular shapes which, when placed onto the pin array of the base component of the primary device indicates to the primary device that the corresponding secondary device has been installed. The primary device could then configure or re-configure itself to begin operation with the attached set of known secondary devices. In practice, the end-user or installation technician would take a first secondary device and physically attach it to the primary device and, thereafter, fit that particular secondary device's corresponding identifier onto the pin array of the base component, using keyed center post 12 or other alignment means in order to facilitate the proper orientation and placement thereon. Likewise, the end-user or installation technician would then physically attach another secondary device to the primary device and, thereafter, fit that secondary device's corresponding identifier onto the pin array of the base component. The process would be repeated until all required or otherwise desired secondary devices have been physically attached or have been placed in communication with or configured with the primary device and each secondary device's associated shaped identifier has been fitted onto the base component's array of fixed pins.

In such a manner and in accordance with the teachings of the present invention to be discussed further herein, the primary device is able to identify which specific secondary devices it has available to it. If, in the instance wherein

the sufficient number of secondary devices required for the proper or safe operation of the primary device have not been attached then the primary device can signal the end-user or installation technician that some secondary device or devices are missing or that the primary system has not yet been fully configured with all intended attachments.

Alternatively, the installation technician could be in possession of a specific identifier which, when placed onto the pin array of the base component of the primary device, indicates to the primary device that the technician requires access to certain previously non-accessible components or that the technician is intending to perform certain service operations on the primary device. Upon placement onto the pin array of the technician's specific identifier, the primary device would recognize the technician and/or the specific operation desired to be performed and allow such maintenance to be done or perform intended certain operations.

Alternatively, the primary device could be a secured entryway, locked passageway, or security door blocking entrance into a room or building in which access is restricted to certain individuals. An individual in possession of, for example, the pentagonal shaped identifier of Fig. 1 which, when placed upon the pin array of the door's base component, would be granted access therein with or without being limited or restricted to accessing further areas inside the room or building. In this same example, an individual in possession of, for example, the triangular identifier of Fig. 1 which, when said identifier is placed by that user onto the pin array of the door's base component would be granted different and perhaps further access rights therein while individual's with the square identifier being treated differently. The primary device could be configured to do one or more internal operations once the identifier placed on the pin array has been accepted and perhaps a user pin number or security code being further required for an additional measure of security.

It should be understood that the present invention can find its uses in many differing applications and the examples provided above are intended to be exemplary and are not to be considered limitations of the embodiments

disclosed. As such, Fig. 1 is primarily for illustrative purposes and is not intended to serve in any way as a limitation.

Preferably, the primary device's CPU is located within the confines of the primary device although it should be understood that the base component of the present invention can be in communication with a CPU via a network or other signal or communication transmission means. One skilled in the art should understand that, in the instance wherein the base component of the present invention is using signal transmission means to communicate with a CPU, antenna means and supporting communication send/receive circuitry means would additionally be required in order to enable or otherwise facilitate the communication therebetween.

Furthermore, it should also be understood that attachment of the base component of the present invention to the primary device is not limited to any particular location on the primary device but rather the location of the base component will be more of a design constraint depending on the type of primary device and the kinds of access or functionality intended by implementation thereof.

Attention is now directed to Figs 2-4 wherein Fig. 2 is a top view of the pentagonal shaped identifier 10A of Fig. 1 illustrating the slot for the passage of the keyed center alignment post and a certain configuration of indicated holes fitted with sleeves therein, as numbered, wherein this identifier's configuration is distinct from the configuration of the identifiers of Figs 3 and 4. Fig. 3 is a top view of the triangular shaped identifier 10B of Fig. 1 illustrating a slot for the passage of the keyed center alignment post and having a configuration of indicated holes fitted with sleeves therein, as numbered, the configuration of which is distinct from the configuration of the identifiers of Figs 2 and 4. Lastly, fig. 4 is a top view of the rectangular shaped identifier 10C of Fig. 1 also illustrating a slot for the passage of the keyed center alignment post and having a configuration of indicated holes fitted with sleeves therein, as numbered, wherein the configuration is distinct from the configuration of the identifiers of Figs 2 and 3.

It should be pointed out that other configurations of the keyed center post, such as having multiple keys or specific shapes are envisioned herein and are intended to be considered within the scope of the present invention. In another embodiment envisioned herein, the base component and the individual identifiers have at least one edge which can be readily identified by color, shape, or other markings thereon such that the person placing the identifier onto the array of pins can properly orient the identifiers prior to pressing the identifier onto the fixed pins.

The identifiers illustrated therein are specifically configured with an array of holes having a one-to-one correspondence with the array of pins 16 of Fig. 1 associated with the base component. The diameter of the individual holes, sleeved or otherwise, is such that each permits an individual pin to pass therethrough when an identifier is pressed onto the pin array. Also shown are pre-selected holes on each identifier wherein sleeves are fitted shown in Fig. 2 at 20a-g, in Fig. 3 at 30a-g, and in Fig. 4 at 40a-f. In the embodiments shown the holes in the identifiers allow the pins to pass through the body of the identifier unobstructed. Each sleeve comes in physical contact with their respective pin passing therethrough. The inner sleeves and the outer surface of the pins are preferably comprised of a conductive material such that when a pin passes through a sleeved hole in an identifier, the pin comes in physical contact with the conductive surface of the sleeve in order to allow electrical communication between that pin/sleeve combination. Although the identifiers illustrated in Figs. 2-4 are configured with a plurality of sleeves it should be understood that the number of sleeves per identifier is a design choice so long as any particular identifier has at least one sleeve in contact with one pin such that the primary device can ascertain which particular identifiers have been fitted onto the pin array of the base component. The sleeve around the larger center post, shown in Fig. 2 at 21, in Fig. 3 at 31, and in Fig. 4 at 41 is also preferably made of a conductive material in order to enable communication with keyed conductive center post 12. Keyed conductive center post 12 is also in electrical communication with the primary device. In this embodiment, the remaining body

of the identifier itself, or a portion thereof, would comprise a non-conductive material in order to prevent undesired cross-communication between adjacent identifiers and between pin/sleeve contacts in the instance wherein it is intended that each be electrically isolated.

5 Shown within each identifier are wires, as dotted lines, which enable each pin/sleeve to communicate with the sleeve of the center hole and thus with the center pin itself. In such a fashion, a closed circuit is enabled between primary device up through each pin and through each pin/sleeve contact, through the indicated wires internally associated with each identifier and over to the center
10 alignment post/sleeve contact, down through the conductive center pin itself and back to the primary device. Also shown in Fig. 2 specifically at 22, is an alternative embodiment wherein internal circuitry is additionally configured within the body of the identifier or associated therewith in order to enable additional functionality or otherwise communicate specific information to the primary device.
15 This is also illustrated at 32 in Fig. 3 and at 42 in Fig. 4.

Although it may not be obvious upon first glance, the identifiers illustrated in Figs 2-4 have been configured such that no two sleeves of separate identifiers contact the same pin along the pin's vertical axis. It is intended herein with this particular embodiment that each identifier have unique pin/sleeve combination
20 configurations such that no two identifiers utilize the same pin to communicate with the primary device. In other words, once an identifier is configured to contact a particular pin by the placement of a sleeve in a particular hole therein, no other identifier amongst the stack of identifiers fitted onto the same pin array can utilize that same pin. This is best seen in the illustration of Fig. 5 which is a
25 top view of the base component 16 of Fig. 1 whereupon identifiers 10A, 10B, and 10C have been placed while indicating the location and direction of the cross-sectional view shown in Fig. 7 which is a top view of the base component of Fig. 1 whereon a row and column have been labeled and numbered such that a matrix of the locations of sleeved holes on the pentagonal shaped identifier 10A
30 of Fig. 2 can be obtained. A [row, column] designation is also shown associated with the identifiers of Figs. 2-4, each labeled in accordance with the designations

of the pins of the base component. Again, in this embodiment, each pin is singularly conductive, i.e., the primary device only can identify one pin/sleeve contact per pin.

Figure 6 illustrates the cross-sectional view of Fig. 5 taken at the slice as indicated therein in order to show that height 'h' of the base component's pin array should be sufficient to hold the individual identifiers 10A, 10B, and 10C, shown alternatively with varying widths fitted thereupon and to show communication means, collectively at 22, for communicating with the primary device. Each of the individual lines of 22 are electrically connected to separate pins such that the primary device can detect a closed circuit therethrough as will be discussed further herein.

As to how the primary device or other pin/sleeve detection means identifies which identifiers have been pressed onto the pin array of the base component, attention is now directed to Fig. 7 which illustrates the apparatus of the present invention wherein base component 6 has the pentagonal shaped identifier of Fig. 3, fitted thereon. In the embodiment illustrated, base component 6 comprises a platform with a 9x9 array of conductive pins, shown collectively at 16, each pin being labeled from 0 to 8. Each pin passes through the fitted identifier when the identifier was oriented correctly and then pressed down onto pin array. Proper orientation of the identifier onto the pin array was ensured by keyed center post 12.

Making use of the array's row column labeling and starting at the upper left most pin, columns are identified thereon as those pins going across the array from left to right and rows being identified as going down the array from top to bottom, as shown. As such, the placement of pentagonal identifier onto the pin array has enabled pin/sleeve contacts at [row, column] locations configured at [(0,4), (3,1), (3,8), (4,1), (4,7), (8,2), (8,4)] corresponding to sleeves 20c, 20f, 20a, 20e, 20b, 20d, and 20g respectively. Similarly and with reference to Fig. 5 and referring to the overlay of the triangular identifier of Fig. 3, locations [(3,4), (4,3), (4,5), (5,3), (5,4), (7,3), (7,5)] corresponding to sleeves 30g, 30f, 30a, 30e, 30b, 30d, and 30c respectively comprises this identifier's particular pin/sleeve

configuration. With reference to Fig. 5 and referring to the overlay of the square identifier of Fig. 4, locations [(2,3), (2,4), (2,5), (3,3), (3,5), (6,4)] corresponding to sleeves 40c, 40d, 40e, 40b, and 40a respectively comprises this identifier's pin/sleeve configuration.

5 First, a polling of each of the pins in the 9x9 array of pins occurs and a detection process is performed in order to determine which pin/sleeves contacts within the entire pin array have closed circuits, as discussed above. The detection of closed circuits is well known in the arts. The primary device then assembles, or is otherwise provided by the detection process, designations of the
10 individual rows and columns of the closed circuit pin/sleeve contacts detected over the entire pin array. These are thus given by: [(0,4), (2,3), (2,4), (2,5), (3,1), (3,3), (3,4), (3,5), (3,8), (4,1), (4,3), (4,5), (4,7), (5,3), (5,4), (6,4), (7,3), (7,5), (8,2), (8,4)]. It should be understood that all the primary device knows at this point is that these locations are considered closed circuits but it has yet to
15 determine which identifiers these pin/sleeve combinations reference.

Utilizing the fact that no two sleeves contact the same pin by the uniqueness of each identifier's configuration, a comparison procedure is initiated wherein the primary device takes the first detected location in the set of all detected locations, in this instance (0,4), and finds which identifiers in its
20 database of known identifiers are configured to have a sleeve at this array location. For example, let's suppose that the primary device finds two identifiers stored within its database which have a configuration utilizing the (0,4) location for one of it's sleeves. One identifier in its database has the configuration of locations [(0,0), (0,4), (3,1), (7,7)] and the other is our pentagonal identifier
25 configured to utilize the array locations [(0,4), (3,1), (3,8), (4,1), (4,7), (8,2), (8,4)], as indicated above. For each matched identifier found for a specific detected array location, all the stored locations associated with each matched identifier are compared against the list of detected locations in order to find a completely matched set. Comparing, at location (0,0) of the first matched identifier, the
30 primary device determines that this location was not detected so it throws that identifier out as not being a match since not all of that identifier's pin/sleeve array

locations exist in the set of detected locations. The primary device compares the remaining array locations corresponding to its second matched identifier which also matched at detected location (0,4). Continuing, the primary device determines that within the set of detected locations, a match is found for each of the pentagonal shaped identifier's locations stored in its database. Thus, the pentagonal identifier has been identified. The primary device then removes or otherwise flags those locations in the set of detected locations associated with the pentagonal identifier as being accounted for. Thus, the following set of detected locations is generated wherein locations already associated with the pentagonal identifier (indicated by underscoring) are shown: [(0,4), (2,3), (2,4), (2,5), (3,1), (3,3), (3,4), (3,5), (3,8), (4,1), (4,3), (4,5), (4,7), (5,3), (5,4), (6,4), (7,3), (7,5), (8,2), (8,4)]. Removing the flagged locations from the set of detected locations generates the following: [(2,3), (2,4), (2,5), (3,3), (3,4), (3,5), (4,3), (4,5), (5,3), (5,4), (6,4), (7,3), (7,5)]. Moving to the next location in the set of detected locations, that being location (2,3), the primary device again searches its database for known identifiers whose configurations utilize the (2,3) location. Let's assume that in this iteration the primary device finds three identifiers in its database with configurations utilizing the (2,3) location. One matching identifier has stored locations [(1,3), (2,3), (5,6), (7,4), (8,8)], for example. Another matching identifier has stored locations [(2,3), (2,4), (5,5), (5,8), (7,1)], for example, and, lastly, our square identifier's locations [(2,3), (2,4), (2,5), (3,3), (3,5), (6,4)] are also retrieved. Again, for each matched identifier found in its database, the primary device compares all the stored locations configured therewith against the remaining locations in the set of detected locations in order to find a completely matched set. For the first identifier found matching the (2,3) location no detected location corresponds to its (1,3) location. Therefore, this retrieved identifier is not a match and is consequently tossed out. Moving on to the second identifier found matching the (2,3) location, the (2,4) matches but the (5,5) does not. Therefore, this identifier is also not a match and is discarded. Moving on to the third identifier found matching the (2,3) location (our square identifier), the primary device determines that all the stored locations configured

for this identifier can be found in the set of remaining (non-flagged) detected locations. Thus our square identifier is a match. Next, the locations associated with the square identifier are then flagged (indicated once again by underscoring) in the set of detected array locations. This generates the following: [(2,3), (2,4), (2,5), (3,3), (3,4), (3,5), (4,3), (4,5), (5,3), (5,4), (6,4), (7,3), (7,5)]. Again, removing the flagged locations from this set produces the following: [(3,4), (4,3), (4,5), (5,3), (5,4), (7,3), (7,5)]. Next, the primary device then searches its database for known identifiers whose configurations match at the (3,4) array location. Let's assume, for brevity, that there is only one matched identifier utilizing the (3,4) location found in the database and it happens to be our triangular identifier with stored locations [(3,4), (4,3), (4,5), (5,3), (5,4), (7,3), (7,5)]. A comparison by the primary device of the triangular identifier's configured array locations against the set of detected locations indicates a complete matched. When these matched locations are then removed from the set of remaining detected locations, the set becomes empty. Therefore, all detected pin/sleeve array locations have been accounted for. As such, all identifiers have been properly identified. In the instance wherein no match can be found in the database of stored known identifiers and their respective pin/sleeve configurations for a location in the set of detected locations, the primary device can go into an alarm condition or initiate a predefined set of processes and/or procedures to indicate that a fault condition has occurred.

In summary, what is disclosed is a base component comprising an array of pins with each pin fixed to said base. A keyed center post also fixed to the base component is utilized thereon to ensure proper orientation and placement of the identifiers onto the pin array. Individual identifiers are preferably made of a non-conductive material are also disclosed wherein each identifier comprises an array of holes each in alignment with a pin in the pin array of the base component. A keyed center hole in each identifier having a conductive sleeve is provided through which the keyed center post passes. Each identifier is specifically and uniquely configured with at least one conductive sleeve placed in a predetermined hole or pattern of holes such that no two sleeves on separate

identifiers contact the same pin when fitted onto the pin array. Wiring associated with each identifier electrically connects each conductive sleeve with the sleeve positioned around the identifier's keyed center hole. A closed circuit is enabled between the primary device up through wiring leading to each individual pin, through each pin/sleeve contact, through the wiring associated with that identifier and over to the center alignment post/sleeve contact, down through the center pin itself and back.

In order to determine which identifiers have been placed onto the pin array, the individual pins in the fixed pin array are polled and a detection process determines which pins have closed circuit configurations, as discussed above. The detection process preferably returns a set of pin/sleeve locations in [row, column] format which defines the locations of the individual pins on the pin array. A first location is then extracted from the returned set of detected locations. Known identifiers and their defined set of pin/sleeve locations stored in a database of known identifiers are selected which have a location matching the first extracted detected location's [row, column] values. Identifiers which have one location matching the extracted detected location are then retrieved from the database of known identifiers as candidates requiring further analysis. For each of the determined identifiers retrieved from the database of stored identifiers and their respective pin/sleeve [row, column] locations, a process would then step through the stored locations for each of the retrieved identifiers and, through a comparison technique, determine which specific identifier has all of its stored locations in common with locations in the set of detected locations. Since, in this embodiment, no two identifiers, when pressed onto the pin array, are allowed to utilize the same pin/sleeve location, the full set of locations for one of the retrieved stored identifiers will be a subset of the set of detected locations. If one location from the set of stored locations for any of the retrieved identifiers does not match any of the locations from the set of detected locations, then that identifier is thrown out or otherwise considered not to be a match and is therefore not one of the identifiers which has been fitted onto the pin array. When it is determined by comparison that each location contained in the entire set of a

retrieved identifier's locations have a match in the set of detected locations, then that identifier is acknowledged and those matching locations in the set of detected locations are then flagged as having been accounted for or are alternatively removed from the set of detected locations. The set of detected locations would now contain remaining detected locations for other identifiers to be matched with. The process repeats itself by then extracting another location from the set of detected locations. Identifiers in the database of stored identifiers are retrieved which have one location matching the extracted location. For each location in the set of each of the retrieved identifiers, a comparison is made to again determine which retrieved identifier's set of stored locations is considered a subset of the set of remaining or non-flagged detected locations. Identifiers are thrown out which do not have a complete match and a single identifier is identified which has all of its stored locations matching locations within the set of detected locations. This identifier is then otherwise acknowledged. Those matching locations within the set of detected locations corresponding to the recently acknowledged identifier are then flagged as having been accounted for or are alternatively removed from the set. The process again repeats itself until the set of detected locations is empty, i.e., all detected locations have been accounted for and all the identifiers have been acknowledged. In the instance wherein no match can be found in the database of stored identifiers and their respective pin/sleeve locations for one or more detected locations in the set of detected locations, an alarm condition can be set or a predefined set of processes and/or procedures can alternatively be initiated to indicate a fault condition.

While the invention is described with reference to a particular embodiment, this particular embodiment is intended to be illustrative, not limiting. Various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the amended claims. Modifications and alterations will occur to others upon reading and understanding this specification; therefore, it is intended that all such modifications and alterations are included insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or equivalents thereof.